

**NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT**

**SCHOOL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN
GUIDELINES**

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Introduction

The following materials are guidelines developed to assist school administrators with the design of an effective emergency management plan. While this plan may never be needed, its development and subsequent use will be essential to the control and mitigation of emergencies.

The checklist is a guide for schools of all sizes and is generalized for all situations. It should be expected that certain items in this guidance may not pertain uniformly to all school facilities. Therefore, each school should evaluate the needs of the facilities and incorporate the applicable components. Remember to consider the age of the students, the internal and external environment and all other factors affecting your facility and adjust the checklists accordingly.

It is our hope that the students in your schools remain safe and secure at all times. This planning initiative will increase the school systems capability to meet those goals.

Available Resources & Resource Materials

Many government agencies have done extensive research that will provide the resources to develop your plan. Many of these agencies may also be able to provide individual assistance. These may include the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the State, County, and Local Offices of Emergency Management. Local agencies in your municipality to utilize are the Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, Department of Public Works, local utility companies, and organizations such as the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

Before beginning an exhaustive search for minor facts, use these existing sources of information. For example, when doing a risk analysis chart to determine the frequency of an event, call your county or local Office of Emergency Management who is likely to have that kind of statistical information. You should obtain a copy of the local Emergency Operations Plan for the planning group to become familiar with the intricacies and responsibilities of each section. You may have already contributed to sections that apply to the school system, however. The planning group should read the entire document. The checklist and plan are the means of incorporating this information to tailor it to your specific needs. Research efforts should not be directed at finding the information, but rather finding who already has the information.

Schools and the Emergency Management System

An **emergency** is any unplanned event, which can cause significant injuries, cause substantial damage, disrupt normal operations, and/or threatens the success or existence of an organization. **Emergency Management** is the process of planning for, responding to, recovering from and mitigating the emergency.

As a school official, you have the responsibility for the welfare of the students. Typically the municipality may look to use school facilities for the safety of people in the community as part of the local emergency management plan. Non-governmental organizations may also include school facilities in their emergency plans. Developing a coordinated plan will help to successfully endure and mitigate the potential effects of emergencies.

Responsibilities of the School

Depending on the severity of a given emergency, you may be responsible for evacuating all or part of a building due to a fire, or efforts may be needed to assure medical care if a building has collapsed. At a minimum, you will be responsible for issues such as the following.

- C The safety and supervision of students, faculty, staff and visitors to the school.
- C Timely evacuation of facilities.
- C Provision of food, shelter and care to all those in need and requesting assistance, including the residents of the community or evacuees from outside the area.
- C Coordination with local emergency operations plans and community resources.

Developing a Plan

Creating a School Planning Committee

You start by forming a group representing different interests of the school, who will be responsible for organizing the research and formation of an emergency plan. The primary group should consist of school officials with decision making power and people who would be involved in the implementation of such a plan. The school system may already have a crisis management team assembled that has gained experience with other emergency situations. Nevertheless, representatives of the planning group should represent the leadership of the school, security, safety and risk management, legal counsel, financial, human resources, medical, facility management, and public relations.

Inclusion of other people or groups with experience in specific areas of the local government should be made such as:

- C Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Service, Office of Emergency Management, Department of Public Works, American Red Cross.

It is important to have the knowledge and cooperation of all these groups to develop a plan which can be implemented smoothly. Do not develop the plan in a vacuum.

The Checklist

The State Office of Emergency Management has developed a checklist to guide you through the design and implementation of an emergency management plan. Remember that the plan is for future occurrences and consideration should be made for what resources will be available. By “answering” the items on the checklist, the plan will start to write itself. Keep the following in mind during the planning process:

- C *The checklist is only a guide.* If your situation requires planning for something that is not included, add it to the checklist.
- C The checklist is designed to help develop a plan using resources already available.
- C The checklist will assist in identifying resource shortfalls so that they can be addressed.
- C Since some aspects may not be applicable to your situation, do not leave those sections blank. Instead, mark “N/A” (Not Applicable) for the appropriate element, so anyone evaluating the plan in the future will recognize that this section was addressed.
- C List any changes that would help strengthen the plan in the future.
- C List all planned resource allocations that will impact the emergency plan.
- C Include notes on building layouts which may pose restrictions on utilizing the facility as a shelter, or impede emergency responses. This information may be used when considering changes to a structure, or construction of a new facility.

Time Lines

Time lines will allow you to progressively work through a schedule and achieve planning group goals in a consistent manner. One of the failures in planning is the attempt to complete all tasks simultaneously. By developing discrete start/finish dates, you will be able to focus on manageable portions of the emergency plan writing. Remember not to lose sight of the overall objective of a comprehensive plan. Always start with the framework of the “Basic Plan,” then complete the other sections.

- C Establish a time line for completion for each section of the plan.
 - Place a date of completion next to each section on the table of contents with a date of final completion
 - Remember to include time to review each section after it is completed. Include appropriate review
- C Include a date for future review.
 - At a minimum, annual reviews are suggested.
 - Maintain familiarity with the plan.
 - Introduce and train new faculty and staff to it.
 - Reviews provide an opportunity for changes in resource, facilities, or procedures to be incorporated, especially after an event that activated the plan.

Assessment of the Situation

Before planning, you must be aware of your situation. An assessment will detail the risks and the capabilities that will allow you to tailor the response and recovery. The first segment of every section in the plan that needs to be considered is “Situation.” Consider the following examples:

- C Physical factors such as the location of the facility in respect to water, trees, power lines, highways, airports, factories and such.
- C The proximity of emergency service agencies and their capabilities.
 - For example, consider if the fire department is paid, where personnel are at the station ready to respond, or if the personnel are volunteers and are responding from jobs or homes, possibly increasing the response time.
- C The resistance of the facilities to known hazards that have been identified in the local emergency operations

plan.

- Was the facility built to withstand earthquakes? Hurricanes? To what level?
Are there expanses of glass in walls?

C Utilize the local Emergency Operations Plan's Hazard Analysis and Vulnerability Assessment.

Assessment of Resources

Evaluate available internal and external resources of the school and community in regard to the successful implementation of the plan. The information on community resources should be available in the local emergency operations plan.

C Internal resources to analyze.

- Capabilities to extinguish small fires, treat medical conditions, perform light rescue, feed and house faculty/staff and students, provide transportation for an emergency evacuation.
- Staff with medical, rescue or other specialized training which would enhance response capabilities.

C External resources to analyze.

- Lists of emergency agencies and their projected response times during normal conditions.
- Local business resources applicable to an emergency response. For example, a fast food restaurant may be able to accommodate a large number of people and provide them with food and water.
- Unplanned resources, such as "spontaneous volunteers" from the community or other schools.

C List capabilities of the school which may be improved upon and suggestions for doing so with projected time frames.

Hazardous Materials

While planning for hazardous materials may not be considered relevant for a school, you must realize that there are substantial materials on school properties that pose risk. Schools must also consider the environment where the facility is located, as sources of potential risk may be nearby.

C Identify any substances or materials and locations that would pose a health and safety risk to the occupants of the school.

- Science departments, janitorial supply storage, auto shop, facility boiler or maintenance rooms.

C Maintain accurate files for *Right To Know Information*, including Material Safety Data Sheets and Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets on all hazardous materials.

C Maintain an inventory of hazardous substances and how they are stored.

- Include a list of any structural features such as heating units and gas lines which may present a danger within a certain proximity of hazardous materials.

C Provide copies of inventory files at alternate locations in the event school files are unavailable.

- Immediate availability of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets are essential for medical treatment of anyone who has come into contact with a hazardous material, as well as for the clean up effort.
- Do not assume that the Hazardous Materials team or other agency will have these readily available.

C Consider the external sources of hazardous materials.

- Is the school located near a facility that produces or utilizes hazardous materials?
- Is the school located near a major transportation route (road or rail)?

Communications

“Communications” is not only used when referring to equipment or techniques, but in speaking to the correct people at the correct time. An effective response is based upon rapid and accurate communications with the occupants of the school, the public and the local government. You must develop an emergency telephone number list that is readily accessible. The resources and procedures that are tasked in this area are:

C External communications

- Emergency notifications to the schools should originate from the local government (fire, police, 911 centers), or via NOAA Weather Radio.
- Determine what municipal agencies utilize for primary and back up communications. For example, Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services routinely use mobile and portable radios. Radios facilitate the coordination of the local emergency operations center, incident command, search and recovery teams, medical teams and any media relations representatives.
- Consider using a municipal radio frequency to coordinate with municipal agencies. Note that if a major emergency occurred, radio frequencies will get overloaded. Additional traffic on these frequencies could hinder effective communication.
- Cellular phones can be used during localized emergencies, but are not reliable in large scale disasters.
- Notification to off-campus, off-duty personnel can be accomplished through a “telephone call-down tree” or via pagers.

C Internal communications

- Warning procedures to alert the school of an emergency should utilize public address systems, fire alarms and alternative methods such as “runners” in the event of a power failure.
- Hand-held/portable radios are recommended for coordinators of the facility. They provide communication.

C Always consult with the local or county office of emergency management as well as other local agencies and organizations that may provide communications resources.

Crowd Control

Crowd control considerations are not just maintaining physical control of people and boundaries, but also what goes on within them. This need extends beyond the normal concerns of what to do with the student body, but also to the media and “interested” public.

C Direct supervision of the students is the responsibility of the teachers. The school system has the ultimate responsibility.

C Faculty, staff and students should be familiar with evacuation routes from the facilities and where meeting points are on the outside.

- C Accountability for every individual is crucial; attendance should be taken and turned into the incident command or the individual directing the emergency response.
 - Compare attendance at the time of the emergency with the daily records.
- C To avoid restlessness, consider developing activities that occupy the students.
- C Restrict access of curiosity seekers.
- C Anticipate media behavior and the desire to infiltrate the school.
- C Plan to establish a physical perimeter around the school to control all entrances and exits.

Traffic Control

Controlling vehicles at the scene of an emergency are vital planning considerations that must address both incoming and outgoing traffic. Plans must consider the spontaneous arrival of family members, curiosity seekers, volunteers, even school personnel from outside the school's jurisdiction. While the plan may relinquish the responsibility of traffic control to the municipal government, school personnel should be aware of roles they may fulfill.

- C Responsibility of Traffic Control must be defined in the school plan. Do not assume that the function is automatically a responsibility of the local government.
- C Emergency vehicles will have access to all areas of the facility.
 - Consider parking arrangements if volunteers respond with private vehicles.
 - Enforce parking regulations at the school (i.e., fire lane access).
- C If an immediate evacuation is required, students can be instructed to walk away from the facility. This may be required if there is not enough time to assemble buses.
 - Plans must be developed for walkaway evacuations that address routes to assembly location
- C Establish a bus staging/loading area away from the building or any areas of potential risk.
- C Parents should not be allowed to pick up students at the school if an evacuation is underway. Release of students in evacuation situations should be done at prearranged locations outside the affected area.
- C Students who drive to school should not be allowed to utilize their own vehicles for evacuations. The addition of a large number of vehicles to the simultaneous influx of emergency response units will exasperate the situation. Furthermore, spontaneous evacuation of students with vehicles does not allow for the accountability of their whereabouts that is required.
- C Early school closings should be managed with procedures that are in place and currently used by the school.
- C Media will add a burden to traffic control activities and site access. It is necessary to rely on and plan for local law enforcement organizations to control site accessibility.

Media Relations

Media relations can make or break the success of an operation. In all emergencies, remember that there are two versions of reality: first, the actual event, what is really happening, and second, what people think is happening

based on rumors, media reports, past history and perceptions of what they know and hear. The plan's Media Relations/Public Information component, needs to address these and the following:

- C Appoint a school system media representative prior to any event who is knowledgeable in the implementation of the emergency plan and can explain the various activities that are occurring.
 - Think about creating pre-disaster (canned) press releases.
 - Provide facts about the facility and the number of students enrolled.
 - Designate an individual who is comfortable in front of the media and presents an "honest" image.
 - Be prepared to address the who, what, where, when, why and how.
- C Create a separate area for the media where they can see what is going on and get information. This should be at a safe distance, away from the students and sectioned off from the response activities.
 - Schedule ongoing press conferences and ensure that the proper officials are in attendance.
- C Anticipate media behavior, manage information dissemination and establish rumor control mechanisms.
- C Be conscious that your media relations work must not only involve students and their families, but also the issue of family members and students directly interacting with the media.

Student Roles

There are many roles that students can fulfill in emergency situations, however. Under no circumstances should a student be sent into a dangerous situation.

- C Issues
 - Students should be used as needed outside of the affected (danger) area.
 - Students chosen should be responsible individuals and have prior written consent from parents or guardians.
 - Training must be provided to any student who is tasked with a role in the emergency plan.
 - Distinctive identification should be provided to students fulfilling emergency responsibilities.
- C Roles
 - Use students to "run" from area to area passing along paperwork, or gathering equipment. They may also be used to verbally deliver a message if other systems are down.
 - Students may be assigned leadership roles to direct specific activities (e.g., attendance at the assembly point).
 - Some students may be members of the local emergency medical service and fire department and can add their training to the overall response effort. (Note: consider these roles based upon legal issues such as whether they can be released from the responsibility of the school, the legal responsibility of the volunteer agency, and parental/guardian consent.)

Release of Students

In the event that the school will be shut down for the remainder of a school day, students should be sent home as soon as proper notifications are made and transportation is available.

- C Proper notifications to parents/guardians must be made following established school system policies.
 - If parents/guardians are unreachable, keep the student at the school or reception site until notification is made.

C Coordinate the release with the responsible individuals for “Traffic Control” and “Media Relations” in the plan.

C If the closing of the school is due to an emergency, but not an evacuation:

- Direct students onto buses and maintain accountability of students as they board by checking off names.
- Designate and utilize an area of the facility where students can be picked up by their parents. Parents should check in and sign a release.
- Students with their own transportation, should after parental notification and assessment of their ability to safely operate a vehicle, be instructed to proceed home immediately. Students driving home should be allowed to only transport other students or siblings if prior parental approval is received.

C If the closing is due to an emergency evacuation, follow established procedures to move students and faculty/staff to the designated reception site.

- Release of students at this location should be done after an evaluation of the situation the caused the evacuation (i.e., Is it safe to move?).

Mutual Aid

Schools should enter into mutual aid agreements with similar facilities in the area for personnel and materials to augment existing resources.

C Although mutual aid for Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services and other public safety agencies will not be coordinated by the school, you should be familiar with what agreements exist for mutual aid.

You may want to contact the mutual aid agencies and invite them for a walk through of the facility and provide them with facility and campus maps.

Special Needs Populations

Special needs populations present particular concerns to emergency planners, as typical response activities are magnified. Planning considerations should address needs of hearing, mobility, and sight impairments. There are other groups that may need addressing such as non-English speaking, or specific age ranges that have precise requirements.

C Any procedures for handling special education students should be as simple as possible. Special education students may react more to the emergency situation, thus requiring additional actions on the responder’s part, and/or more responders.

C During evacuations, access/egress to sections of the school may not be available, so alternative methods and routes will be needed. This is especially a concern for mobility impaired individuals.

C Transportation of special needs individuals will require the utilization of equipment already tasked in the day-to-day operations of the school. You should determine whether these resources have been tasked by the local government for evacuation use.

C Sheltering activities also require distinctive procedures for special needs individuals.

- Assure that the reception facility can accommodate the specific individuals.
- Provide the specialized personnel at the reception/shelter facilities to meet the needs of the evacuees.
- Do not assume that the agency/organization that is operating the reception

center/shelter is aware that special needs individuals will be directed there.
Many organizations are not prepared, or will not handle clients with special needs.

- C During any planning effort, attention should be paid to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and New Jersey Barrier Free Sub-Codes if applicable.

Training

Training activities for emergency plans and response activities should be conducted on a continuous basis for all students, faculty and staff. Participation in exercises and drills with the local government are also encouraged. Training should be revised as necessitated by plan changes or experience in actual events. Remember to be inclusive, as everyone has a role in an effective emergency plan. The records of training should be maintained and monitored to assure currentness.

While certain portions of the emergency operations plan may need to be practiced on a more frequent basis, the categories of training fall into two basic categories:

- C Generalized knowledge for students, faculty and staff.

- Potential disasters.
- Warning signals, emergency instructions and appropriate “instant survival techniques.”
- Evacuation routes, staging areas, reception center/shelter locations.
- Availability of personal and group counseling and support following a disaster.
- Updates in the emergency plan that effect the total population of the school.

- C Specialized Knowledge

- Specific duties and procedures assigned to students, faculty and staff to fulfill responsibilities in the emergency plan.
- Local emergency operations plan integration/coordination.
- Consider adding First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation into the student’s

curriculum as well

Future Planning & Activities

Planning for the future does not only involve what you would do differently “the next time” after it happens. It entails considering issues or changes to the internal or external environment that effect your response capabilities. It analyzes possibilities to do things better before they happen. It compares your plan to other plans in the school system and those of the surrounding districts that you may call upon for mutual aid. Finally, it looks at ways to mitigate disasters—before they happen.

One of the most important items, but nevertheless sometimes forgotten is the necessity of continuous revisions to plans and procedures. A plan is never finished. There will always be opportunities to improve. For instance, you should consider a process to document the entire school property and contents on video tape or photographs. This will be valuable evidence in future disasters should the facility be impacted. Critical reviews are essential immediately after a disaster. These should not be limited to only debriefings of personnel, but examining plans and procedures that were utilized.

In addition to corrections to plans and procedures, you may develop a needs list of materials, equipment or even changes to the facility. Prioritize the needs list, identify possible obstacles for the acquisition and develop suggestions to overcome these. This effort becomes part of the ongoing planning effort.

After a disaster, remember to acknowledge the help you received—express your appreciation to those that spent so many hours and faced many risks. This will go a long way toward building relationships in the community.

